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Lilly, Isis Antisense Drug Fails in Trial

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LONDON (Reuters) - U.S. drug company Eli Lilly & Co. said on Monday an experimental lung cancer drug, exploiting so-called "antisense" technology, had failed to show significant benefit when used in combination with chemotherapy.

Affinitak, which Lilly is developing in partnership with U.S. biotech Isis Pharmaceuticals Inc., was seen as a litmus test for antisense, an as yet unproven technology designed to work at the genetic level to block the formation of proteins that cause disease.

But in a statement released in London, Lilly said a Phase III clinical trial showed no statistically significant improvement in overall survival in those patients given the drug alongside conventional chemotherapy.

Patients receiving Affinitak plus the chemotherapy regimen of carboplatin and paclitaxel experienced a median survival of 10 months, compared to 9.7 months for patients receiving chemotherapy alone.

Lilly said it remained committed to investigating antisense technology despite the setback and would continue to work in partnership with Isis.

Isis, based in Carlsbad, California, is a leader in antisense and its Affinitak product was designed to block a specific gene from producing a protein believed to play a role in cancer cell development and growth.

Isis Chairman and CEO Stanley Crooke said he was disappointed by the outcome of the clinical trial but planned to work with Lilly to determine the future of the in non-small cell lung cancer.

Isis currently makes the world's only commercial antisense drug – a treatment for a rare type of eye infection in AIDS (news - web sites) patients.

Many once-promising antisense drugs have failed, including experimental therapies from Isis for HIV (news - web sites) and genital warts.